MFR 04016 759

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

Event: Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) New York TRACON (N90)

Type of event: Interview with Steve Saul

Date: Tuesday, December 16, 2003

Special Access Issues: ID Check

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Team Number: 8

Location: N90, 1515 Stewart Ave., Westbury, NY 11590

Participants - Non-Commission: Mary M. McCarthy (Office of Regional Counsel, Eastern Region, FAA – One Aviation Plaza, RM 561, Jamaica, NY 11434: P 718-553-3259, F 718-995-5699)

Participants - Commission: John Azzarello, Miles Kara, Geoffrey Brown

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Note: Please refer to the interview recording for further details.

Background:

Saul was a pilot and flew commuter airplanes prior to becoming an air traffic controller (ATC). In 1982 after the air traffic control strike he was hired as a controller in the Islip area and as a training specialist. He worked as a procedure specialist, a controller in the LaGuardia sector, and then went to Islip Tower for two years as a supervisor. He returned to N90 as a specialist at the Traffic Management Unit (TMU), and then became a supervisor for Liberty sector. He has been a supervisor at Liberty sector for 13 years.

September 11, 2001 (9/11):

American Airlines Flight 11 (AA 11):

Around 7:51 AM on 9/11 Saul began a shift as supervisor for Liberty Sector. Around 8:40 AM Saul was training a controller, and there was a Controler in Charge (CIC) for the sector. The CIC called him over and pointed out American Airlines Flight 11 (AA 11) which they believed was a hijack. Saul had just recently heard that a hijacker from an event from over twenty years ago had just been caught, so it did not surprise him that "someone" had "gotten the idea" to hijack another flight.

Since the flight did not originate in New York Center airspace, he could not pull up any information on the flight. This was normal, since the flight originated in Boston Center airspace. Saul was told that the last known altitude for the flight was 29000.

Based on his experience, Saul guessed the flight had a speed of approximately 300 or 400 knots. Below 10000 feet, aircraft are only allowed to have a flight speed of 250 knots, and thus this was alarming. Saul advised the floor that there was a NORDO flight, and did not spread news of it being a hijack so as to not alarm the whole floor.

Saul watched the radar at the "main bang" – the four mile gap directly above the point of a radar – for AA 11 to reappear on the radar. Saul expected to see the aircraft fifteen or twenty miles west of New York considering the speed at which the aircraft was traveling.

Saul heard a report that the World Trade Center (WTC) was on fire, and realized that AA 11 had hit the WTC. Saul thought initially that a disgruntled company pilot had done this intentionally, but not as an act of terrorism. He had not heard of the threatening cockpit communications. From the time he heard of the hijacking to the point of impact was approximately three minutes at the most, according to Saul.

Saul recalls that the pilots on the frequencies were conferring through the controllers and they had started to put together that it might have been a commercial airliner. But Saul had begun to think it was most likely a private jet sized aircraft. But the pilots were telling the controllers that it could not have been a small aircraft considering the level of damage to the WTC.

United Airlines Flight 175 (UAL 175):

Don Krizohlavy took over for Steve Vollaro, and received a "point out" of an aircraft. That aircraft was descending into Krizohlavy's airspace. Krizohlavy was anxious, and Saul walked up to Krizohlavy's radar, pointed at the target, and told Krizohlavy to consider it a "terrorist aircraft". Saul remembers that the aircraft was descending from 16000 feet and was traveling at approximately 400 knots.

Krizohlavy calmed down, and continued to monitor the aircraft.

Saul went to the TMU desk, and told Ron Regan, Bob Birch's superior, that there was another flight incoming, and requested for their to be military assistance. Saul noted that his comment was out of frustration because he knew that there were no fighters close enough to respond.

Saul noted that he was alarmed because he held the opinion that if the aircraft was landing at one of those airports, it would not have been descending at such a quick rate.

Saul watched the altitude descend until the target disappeared from the scope.

Aftermath:

Within a few minutes all departures out of the New York area controlled by N90 were stopped per the direction of Ron Regan.

Saul noted that some of the controllers were upset by the events of 9/11, and clearing the airspace was difficult.

AA 77 and UAL 93:

He found out about the AA 77 and the Pentagon attack while speaking with his wife. He believes he was still in the facility when UAL 93 went down.

Bill Allen took over from Saul around 9:17 AM. Saul came back on duty approximately 45 minutes from then.

Other aircraft:

Saul noted that there are general aviation aircraft that are allowed to fly the passage up the Hudson River, and that some controllers thought it might have been a small aircraft, but most of the pilots were certain it was a commercial airliner. Saul told the controllers that it was a commercial airliner. Saul noted that there was less certainty over the second aircraft that hit the WTC (UAL 175).

The Hudson River corridor is a passage through which flights can travel without restrictions as long as they keep their aircraft below 1000 feet.

Saul has no knowledge of the Sikorski helicopter or of ELTs on 9/11.

Communication:

Saul did not speak with anyone from the Eastern Region FAA office on 9/11. Nor did he speak with Washington Headquarters. Nor did he speak with anyone from Herndon Command Center. Saul noted that the Watch Desk at N90 holds the responsibility for communicating with these entities.

Record:

Saul noted to Commission staff that there is a Facility Log and a Traffic Management log, both of which report on air events that take place within N90 airspace.

Kennedy:

Saul had heard that there was a flight that had been grounded out of Kennedy Airport that had passengers on board that were extremely suspicious. He is thankful that the flights were grounded quickly for fear that there were other hijacks planned.

Observations:

Saul noted that the airspace routes are so congested that it was extremely difficult to monitor the path of one flight that was off course.

Saul noted that the aircraft carriers at times allow the passengers to monitor the frequency and communications between the controllers and the pilots. This is done at the discretion of the pilot.

Based upon his experience as a pilot and a flight trainer, Saul believes that aircraft cockpits need to be extremely secure.

Saul noted that there needs to be better security at the smaller airports as well, since general aviation aircraft would be very difficult to stop.

Saul noted that there are times that on the midnight shift he is in charge of the facility. He noted that he feels adequately prepared for that responsibility, and for the methods necessary to notify the military in case of another terrorist event.